

Medieval Art

Ivory and Boxwood Carvings 1450-1800

Ivory and boxwood carvings 1450 to 1800 have been one of the most prized medieval artwork during such time. The ivory sculpting and carving have been very famous because of the fact that it helps the artists to express a greater amount of artistic interpretation and expressionism. The good thing about the technique is that it makes it easier to create fine details of artwork. Ivory and boxwood carvings have been so famous in the medieval era because of the elegance that it exudes. For every art pieces that are created out of the materials are creating a sense of elegance and wealth during such time and hence, many people are patronizing this type of artwork. Apparently, it was during the eras of Renaissance and Baroque that ivory and boxwood carvings have really flourished. During such a time, the artworks are primarily used for private devotion. As a matter of fact, many people are buying the artwork made out of such carvings for their collections. Also, it is interesting to note that the lustrous surface of every artwork and pieces made out of it are very enticing to the people who have lived in the Renaissance and Baroque eras. It is in this regard that this type of technique has been exploited and loved by many people. Although it originated in Africa, it has flourished and adopted by many nations. Up to this date, ivory and boxwood carvings are still being sought after by many artwork collectors. It is said that this type of artwork will forever be timeless. Even in the future, the elegance and the enticing effect of these artworks will definitely enable more artists to work using the technique since the demand is perceived to increase later on. But then again, a greater and in-debt analysis of the technique should be made in order to gain understanding of the matter.

One of the most important ivory carvings that are known to this date is the Hercules and Achelous sculpture. Taking a closer look and scrutiny of the artwork, it can be said that it speaks about the dominance of the male power. As can be seen, Hercules and Achelous are in a very intricate position bearing action. In this regard, the sculpture has been made and carved in a round structure that shows off struggle. Although the artist who made the masterpiece is unknown, it has still made a huge impact to the society. The importance of the artwork is something that cannot be set aside. As a matter of fact, the creation of the artwork was very timely because of the fact that during such time, the dominance of men is very apparent. The society looked up to men with very high regard and they are very well respected. Moreover, the artwork speaks of the reality in the society during such time. Men are fighting over power and dominance not just over women but over their fellow men. It cannot be denied that during such time, men are the pillar of the society. They are dominating and they are the privileged one. They can do whatever they want within the boundaries of the laws. However, there is a constant struggle for power. The men who possess more power and wealth are the leaders of the society. They hold the society at the palm of their hand. And those who have less remained in the background, unnamed and they do not matter. Taking a look at the sculpture again, it highlighted the desire for power by men because of the violent movements which are characterized with exaggerated movement finely and perfectly carved. The emotions and facial reactions are clearly expressive as well.

In Hercules and Achelous ivory masterpiece, it can be said that the artists is more of a realist. The unknown artist has successfully depicted the real emotions and situations that are happening in the society in to the artwork. Not all artists are able to do that. Not all artists are successful in bringing out in their artwork the situation of the society more so creating it perfectly. Especially when elephant tusk, which happens to be the main and primary material that is used in the artwork, comes in no more than 10 feet long. Aside from this, the material is heavy with the weight of almost more than 200 pounds. With this, the artists using this material are using specialized tools in order to be sure that they are able to exploit all the potentials of this material. The process of cutting and carving the tusk needs a very intricate process. As a matter of fact, it is compared to cutting a diamond. This process can be seen with another masterpiece called Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The artwork is so detailed yet revealing and has showed what really happened in the story. Just by mere looking at the picture, one can easily tell what the picture is about. Even without reading the labels. Although there are lots of details that are held in the artwork, it still did not lose the main subject which is the topical coverage of the body of a woman. The sensuality and the passion that the wife of Potiphar had for Joseph are clearly depicted as well. There is no doubt that the creator of the masterpiece has paid a much closer attention to the details of the picture. The bedroom of Potiphar's wife has conformed to the shape of the materials which is not easy to do. There are many intricate details that surround the picture but the creator still managed to ensure that it will not lose focus on the character of the naked woman and the man.

The ivory carvings in the Gothic era in the 13th to 15th century are more inclined into the Christian themes such as Jesus Christ, the disciples, apostles and all other biblical theme. Apparently, the ivory used in this era is particularly taken from the African Savannah elephant which produces elongated upper incisors. But then again, it can be said that this kind of ivory is not as flexible as that the one being used in the 1450 to 1800. This type of ivory is limiting the capabilities of the artists to explore more and produced more artistic interpretation of the masterpiece. In comparison, many are trying to use and get the ivory coming from the tusk of an elephant as it can be sculpted into a masterpiece that is more detailed and extravagant in nature. This has not been a problem though from most artists because the trade for ivory is highly active during the time. The trade is so active and it can be considered to be next in the trade of textile for different countries and nations as well. Hence, there is an abundant of ivory materials for the artists to exploit in creating and making some more extravagant and breathtaking masterpieces for the public to appreciate. This work explores the role of the visual arts in the English church (and especially in its monastic sector) from the reign of Alfred the Great (871-99) to the generation after the Norman Conquest. The primary concern is to elucidate the uses to which art was put, the ways in which it functioned, and the resources it had for doing so. Needless to say, an appreciation of its functions requires a clear understanding of its character and forms. Accordingly, it shall be considering the nature of the surviving artefacts and their visual language in order to assess what they could convey and how they did so.

The decision to focus this study on a period of approximately two hundred years in the history of one country reflects two complementary considerations which the reader may be interested to know at the outset. It was dictated by the wish to have a field which was sufficiently large to allow people to perceive contours and changes within it, yet which was at the same time sufficiently confined for us to be able to make valid generalizations about it as a whole. Many of the issues discussed are equally relevant to other periods and countries, as are various of the findings. However, it seems wholly preferable to offer observations that are undoubtedly pertinent for their particular context (and which may well also have broader implications), rather than to offer generalizations which are only moderately appropriate for much of the material to which they purport to relate. What is offered here, therefore, is a set of interrelated, quite sharply focused studies, which collectively define some of the parameters of the field as a whole, while casting a clear light on particular areas within it. The questions which we may profitably ask of the art of the late Anglo-Saxon church in our bid to elucidate the roles it fulfilled are to a large extent defined by the limitations of the available evidence. It is impossible to explore in any depth the nature and functions of Anglo-Saxon mural painting, for example, when the surviving physical evidence is limited in the extreme, and there are virtually no descriptive documentary sources. Decoration and ornament, on the other hand, survive in a fair quantity in a variety of media and can be examined in some detail. Moreover, despite (or perhaps because of) their ubiquitousness, they have received considerably less attention than figural imagery from modern commentators. Yet they were undoubtedly very important for contemporaries.

On account of all these factors, they are given sustained treatment in this work. At the same time, it would be disingenuous not to state that the selection of themes and issues for discussion is a personal, albeit not unrepresentative, one. The loss of countless works of art of the highest quality and prominence is a serious impediment to the historian of the visual culture of late Anglo-Saxon England. Of the most costly, important, and public works, such as major programmes of sculptural or painted decoration, large-scale three-dimensional effigies, textiles, altars, precious-metal crosses and vessels, very little survives. Furthermore, for a study like this, the lacunae are even greater. No less important for assessing the role of art than the works themselves is their setting, and this too has largely vanished. This is not to ignore the achievements of modern architectural historians and archaeologists; on the contrary, their painstaking work throughout the century and especially in the latter decades of it has revealed in great detail the design, the history, and the formal affiliations of many of the most important buildings. Plans and reconstructions convey a clear impression of these structures. Yet such work, admirable though it is, cannot fully convey what these buildings were like as the immediate setting for the art which is our concern here. For this setting consisted as much of liturgy, ceremony, music, and belief as of architecture. The perception of the most important works of art in the late Anglo-Saxon church was a synaesthetic experience which involved sound, light, and movement--not to mention faith and expectations. Art was part of worship and belief. Hence it cannot be denied that such artworks are primarily made and created in order to ensure that history is preserved and as a form of communicating ideas and thoughts about life in general.

References

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